

Keynote Speech on Regional Cooperation for Human Security

Dr. Surin Pitsuwan:

“Thank you very much for the kind introduction. I ask for this podium because I feel insecure sitting down while talking. It is a habit or an idiosyncrasy that has been developed throughout my parliamentary years – when you speak in the Parliament, when you speak on stage, trying to ask for people to vote for you, you have to stand up. But, of course, I’m not here today to ask for your vote. Actually, before entering the room, I was greeted and congratulated by a number of people. I think I deserve some sympathy more than congratulation. At first, I thought I would be away in New York at the advisory board on the council for foreign relations, the units that issue and publish foreign affairs, but the schedule has been too tight. I told Dr. Chantana that I would be able to come and share some thoughts with you and your participants. I did not expect this warm welcome from the participants, so thank you very much! But when we talk about human security, we usually think of it as something new, something noble, something that has just been invented for the world, for the international community facing a different set of challenges, particularly after the end of the Cold War, the crumbling of the Berlin Wall symbolizing the end of ideological conflicts. We thought that human security should be a new paradigm to think, to discuss, and to cooperate for the protection of our society, our people, our way of life. But really, ladies and gentlemen, human security is the primary purpose of organizing a state in the beginning. If you read the Social Contract – I feel like a professor today – theorists like Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Hume, you will see very clearly that people enter civil society and civil states from the state of nature in order to seek protection. Hobbes was very clear that in the state of nature was ‘rash, nasty, brutish, and short’. Of course you remember that from Leviathan. So people decided to leave the state of nature where man was having war with other man in order to come into a civil society in order to seek protection for their lives, livelihoods and safety. Rousseau talked about relinquishing your own will, or your own right to self-defense to a super entity called the sovereign or the state. Again for the same reason – in order to help protect people in the society in the state. John Locke thought that when you put your labor mixed with nature, that part of nature becomes yours in order to protect that property including your life, including the pursuit of freedom, you need to come into the state. Really the concept of human security is not that new. It is just being re-packaged, it is being retooled, and now presented for the purpose of us to think about life during the time when wars between states are becoming rarer and rarer but internal violence within states, between ethnic groups, is becoming more and more prevalent. People refer to [name inaudible] for his groundbreaking report in 1994 on human development. He said that from now onward the concept of security will be dramatically changed. It will have to shift from the focus on the states to the focus on the human persons. He said “I am reviving this concept because the new era is demanding that we shift the paradigm of defense of security from territory, from states, from sovereignty, to the well-being of the human people”. Why did he use the word revisit or revive? Well, I believe in 1941, Franklin Deleanor Roosevelt, in his famous speech, was already talking about freedom from want and freedom from fear. What I’m submitting to you today is that the new era of globalization, of integration, is demanding that our paradigm about defense, about protection, about security, must be transformed, must be recalibrated. That’s how the

human security concept came into being. It came into being because it was needed. I can't keep my voice up because I don't drink because I'm fasting because this is Ramadan – so I'm speaking to you hungry. So there have been two streams of thought on human security. The one I would call the western approach which was established or initiated by the government of Canada – we have Canadian friends here – by the foreign minister of Canada at that time, Lloyd Axworthy and his colleague in Norway. They came up with this idea that the concept of state sovereignty is no longer relevant in the modern world when, in many cases like Rwanda in 1994, like Kosovo in 1998, when warring tribes and ethnic groups and communities were killing each other and the international community was just standing by doing nothing. Kofi Annan asked what do you want the UN to do when all of you are saying that this is internal, this is domestic, this is our national affairs so don't get involved. Well millions perished in Rwanda. Hundreds of thousands died in the Balkans, not only Kosovo but in many other places too. So these two men got together and created what they called the human security network and came up with this commission to promote the work of the commission. Here it is, translated into Thai, issued a report, the commission was called: State Sovereignty and Intervention. Rather than the right to intervene on behalf of the victims being killed, being maimed, being tortured, the report came up with a new title – it's not the right to intervene, in these days and age, it is rather the responsibility to protect, or RTP. It was descended to Kofi Annan who said: 'I wish I thought of the phrase', because it was a very innovative and shifting paradigm. From debating about the rights to go in to the responsibility to stand by and help protect the victims of genocide, victims of civil wars, victims of communal..." [Tape ends]

Dr. Surin Pitsuwan [Continued from previous tape]:

"...still very jealous of their own sovereignty concept. Another word for those states and governments for whom state-building is not yet finished felt and feel rather annoyed by this concept of responsibility to protect. But it is a very good report. I recommend all of you who are interested in human security to read it. I think you can get it from the Canadian embassy worldwide. You can have it in Thai if you'd like. They were talking about crimes perpetrated by people who take advantage of situations where the state could not be there to protect or to promote or to help their own citizens. Talk about small arms—you know small arms kill people more than big wars everyday. Talk about child soldiers, trained or bribed children to fight on your behalf or for your cause. Very unkind. Very nasty. But they are child soldiers in the world even today. Talk about landmines, talk about issues of difficult realities around the world. As a concept, it broke new ground in international relations, in international law, but as a tool to go around and try to manage conflicts around the world, it has not been fully welcome because, as I said, it was a bit too offensive, too aggressive, it sounds a bit too interfering and invasive. The Japanese government came up with an alternative view of human security. The late prime minister helped create a commission. The commission came up with this report – Human Security Now. We could call it an Eastern approach towards human security, we could call it a Japanese approach towards human security, but the difference between this one and the other one is that this one deals with soft issues of human security. It talks about the protection of victims of conflicts as well as the promotion of human

development. Because the best way to guarantee human security is to help people fulfill his or her own potentialities. That will guarantee his or her security in every situation everywhere that he or she happens to find himself or herself. So it talks about human development, it talks about the fulfillment of human potentialities, it talks about diseases, education, it talks about the environment that could affect the livelihoods of people in communities. So these are the two streams of thought on human security. Where are we in the region? I'm talking about Southeast Asia because you might want to ask me about human security from the regional perspective. In 1997, the financial crisis came to Thailand on the first or the second of July. I remember it well because that was the reason why we came into government, because of the financial crisis, because the government before us threw in their towels and resigned. So we came into the government and inherited the problem of the financial crisis. All of a sudden, the achievement of Thailand, of Malaysia, of Indonesia, of the Philippines, all the way to South Korea, the achievements through three or four decades of economic growth were reduced, crumbled, because of the financial crisis. People were left without protection, people were left without social safety nets, people were left without any systems to care for them or for them to turn to. It was at the ASEAN ministerial meeting in Manila in 1998, a year later, that I brought up an idea among dialogue partners, with the US, with Canada, with China, with the EU, with Australia, with New Zealand, all the dialogue partners I brought up an idea that I called the social safety net caucus to help design for ASEAN countries some minimum level of social and economic protection in times of adversity like an economic crisis. It was not very much welcomed because it was thought that the phrase social safety net was a foreign phrase that was being introduced into ASEAN language. But the idea, the germ of the idea, was there because of the financial crisis and because of the abrupt poverty that our people fell into immediately as a result of the financial crisis. Later on, we were visited by issues like SARS and the bird flu. I call these problems of globalization, of integration. Because without globalization you would not find a disease originating in Hong Kong hit Toronto. That's because of globalization. That's because of integration. We only talk about the good side of globalization and integration but we have many problems. People need to be protected too. The region needs to come together and talk about ways and means and mechanisms to protect the livelihood of our people because of these unprecedented diseases that could propagate, that could be contagious overnight across the globe. It could be very devastating to human security. Then came terrorism. Another threat to our safety, our security, our livelihood. The ASEAN countries got together and decided that they needed some sort of agreement, some sort of common agenda on how to manage the threat of terrorism that was witnessed by the bombings in Bali, Jakarta and in other places. So I think the region got together very quickly and decided that certain problems, certain threats could fall in between states and could not be managed by national governments, could not be resolved by national states, but these problems fall in between the gaps of state powers. That's when we got together on many occasions and learned to address these threats to human security in the region together from a regional perspective. Have we been successful? Yes, to a certain extent though not entirely. If you look at the eight development goals of the millennium of the UN signed by a 147 heads of states and governments in the year 2000, ASEAN Southeast Asia has done quite well compared to other regions because we learned to work together, because we learned to pull our resources, best experiences and practices to help protect

our people from the pervasive threats to human lives, human insecurity that we face. I think you can look at the statistics of achievements of the ASEAN countries as compared to other groupings. Of the eight goals, we have done quite well. I think many would agree with me. But the region has to do more. The region has to learn to work together more. The region has to cooperate and coordinate policies, actions and activities more than we have done in the past. In fact, one of the innovations to protect and to promote human security in the social and economic realm was invented here in Thailand in the middle of the crisis in 1997. His majesty the King came up with the concept of sufficiency economy. In order to protect people, his people, in this case, from the volatility of globalization, from the external pressures of opening up exposures, of falling prey of consuming too much, sufficiency economy was brought into being in response to Thailand's own adjustment to the pressure of globalization, to the pressure of exposure, to the pressure of competition. In other words, live within your means. Be wise, prepare yourself adequately to protect yourself, to make yourself immune from external volatility of the world in the globalized age. In the ASEAN countries, there are about forty million people out of 576 million who are still living under the poverty line. They are exposed, threatened, very much living in a situation of tremendous fragility. I think we have to think about those people who live under the poverty line in our midst. I think we have to think about those who are being threatened by daily lack of food, lack of clean water, facing contagious diseases. There are a lot among us. But what can we do? I think that the region must evaluate its own achievements in the past, its experiences in the past, and identify areas where we have to make adjustments. The poorest among us makes about 420 USD per head per year. The richest amongst us earns about 50,000 USD per head per year. We have to do a lot to mitigate the problems of human security between these two extremes in our region. What are the threats to these people – of course, diseases, malnutrition, infertility, death, lack of education, illiteracy, not to mention the degradation of the environment that has put millions in the region into the state of insecurity. These are the problems that are still facing us as a region. These are the problems that we have to learn to manage as a region together under this organization called ASEAN. And the leaders realize this. So they decided that we need a rule-based organization from now onward into the future. It cannot be just informal consultative exchange of views. So the ASEAN leaders came up with the ASEAN Charter which is coming out next month in Singapore. It will give the organization more tools, more resources and a clearer mandate to deal with problems of human insecurity. It is also supposed to give more resources, a clearer direction and more space for the secretariat and for the secretary general. That is certainly welcome because without resources, without authority, without a clear mandate, many of the threats to human security cannot be resolved, cannot be managed. So ladies and gentlemen, what you are doing today and tomorrow is not only going to be relevant and important to Southeast Asia. But it is going to be a guiding light, a beacon of hope, for those who live under perpetual threats to their lives, to their livelihoods, to their communities, all across the globe. Regionally speaking we are only second to Europe. But we are a very far behind second. Compared to other regional groupings we are doing quite well, but we still have to do more. The issues that you are deliberating on today will give many of us who are looking for new ideas, new paradigms, new visions, ammunition or tools to go into the field with confidence and comforted by the fact that there are people around the world, in the region, who care

about the soft issues like human security. Let me end, with this being Ramadan, and I being Muslim, by quoting a wisdom of a Muslim mystic by the name of [inaudible], who in the 17th century Anatalya, Turkey, looked around the territories around him full of conflicts and wars and violence and mused: ‘merchants of all goods are gone; we are the new merchants, the new vendors, and this is our bazaar’. For those of you in this room and at this conference, make sure you take this wisdom to heart and consider yourselves new vendors with new goods, new ideas, for the world, for your community, for your region. You have to come up with new ideas and novel strategies in order to address such a complicated and complex but extremely important issue like human security. You must come up with new ideas because this, the globalized age, is your bazaar. Thank you very much.”